

AMERICAN'S PARTICIPATION IN OUTDOOR RECREATION: Results From NSRE 2000 (With weighted data) (Round 1-4)

The emphasis of this report is on participation patterns across activities and segments of our society. Round 1-4 of *NSRE 2000* cover more than 50 activities, from casual walking outdoors to more challenging activities such as mountain biking and scuba diving. In this report, we describe both general types of outdoor participation and participation in land, water, and snow or ice settings (for details regarding the history and methodology of the NSRE please refer to the Foreword and Introduction sections). A weighting strategy was also used in the reporting of the data that combined both multi-variate and multiplicative weights (i.e., age, race, sex * education * urban/rural strata) as this considered the most appropriate weighting adjustment. This weighting adjustment assured better estimates of recreation participation and trends across the general population.

General Types of Participation

Between July, 1999, and November, 1999, over 17,000 people across the U.S. were asked about their participation in twelve types of outdoor recreation (see Table 1). Each of these types represents two or more similar activities that we have chosen to summarize together. Across all people 16 years and older, we estimate that 97.5 percent participated in some type of outdoor recreation during the 12 months just prior to their interview. This means that more than 202 million people age 16 or older are involved in some form of outdoor recreation. The most popular types of outdoor participation, as measured by number of people participating, include:

| | |
|--|---|
| Individual Trail/Street/ Road Activities | 88.7 percent (183.9 million participants) |
| Traditional Social Activities | 80.1 percent (166.0 million participants) |
| Viewing & Photographing Activities* | 69.4 percent (143.9 million participants) |
| Viewing & Learning Activities | 68.8 percent (142.6 million participants) |
| Driving for Pleasure Activities | 63.0 percent (130.6 million participants) |
| Swimming Activities | 60.0 percent (124.4 million participants) |

The five most popular individual activities and percent of the U.S. population participating were:

| | |
|---|--------------|
| Walking | 84.3 percent |
| Family Gathering | 73.2 percent |
| Viewing Natural Scenery | 60.9 percent |
| Visiting a Nature Center, Nature Trail or Zoo | 57.5 percent |
| Picnicking | 54.9 percent |

For the most part, these types of activities probably owe some of their popularity to their relatively low cost, to the fact that they can be enjoyed with minimal physical exertion, and they do not require any special equipment or developed skills.

Land-Based Activities

Activities that occur primarily on land, rather than on water or snow and ice, constitute the largest category of outdoor recreational participation in the country. Trail, street, and road activities; team sport activities; backpacking and camping activities; viewing and learning activities; hunting; viewing and photographing wildlife; driving for pleasure and sightseeing; and a few social activities are discussed below as they occur primarily in land settings.

Table 1–Percent and number of people 16 years and older in the U.S. participating in 12 types of outdoor recreational activities, 1999-2000.

| Type of Outdoor Activity | Percent of Population 16 or Older | Number in Millions |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------|
| Participated in any Type of Activity | 97.5 | 202.1 |
| Trail/Street/Road Activities | 88.7 | 183.9 |
| Traditional Social Activities | 80.1 | 166.0 |
| Viewing & Photographing Activities* | 69.4 | 143.9 |
| Viewing & Learning Activities | 68.8 | 142.6 |
| Driving for Pleasure Activities | 63.0 | 130.6 |
| Swimming Activities | 60.0 | 124.4 |
| Outdoor Adventure Activities | 55.2 | 114.4 |
| Boating/Floating/sailing Activities | 36.1 | 74.8 |
| Fishing | 34.1 | 70.7 |
| Snow & Ice Activities | 25.7 | 53.3 |
| Outdoor Team Sports | 22.1 | 45.8 |
| Hunting | 11.3 | 23.4 |

Source: 1999-2000 National Survey on Recreation and the Environment, USDA Forest Service and the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Tennessee. The NSRE 2000 is the most recent of the series of National Recreation Survey series begun nationally in 1960. “*” denotes that the estimates for this category of activities were adjusted (by +1.751) to compensation for a problem with a screener question.

Trail, Street, and Road Activities: The single most popular activity in the United States is walking outdoors. An estimated 174.8 million, or 84.3 percent of the 207.3 million (noninstitutionalized) people in the U. S. walk outdoors for fun or exercise one or more times per year (Table 2). Participation can occur on neighborhood streets, in local parks, or in more remote settings such as forest trails. The next most popular trail, street, and road activity is biking with more than 81.9 million participants. Of people who bike, an estimated 43.5 million biked on backcountry roads, trails, or cross country on a mountain bike.

Team sports constitute another category of participation. Team sports, including baseball, football, and soccer, are participated in at least once annually by 45.8 million people.

Backpacking and camping are some of the most traditional forms of outdoor recreation. An estimated 22.8 million people 16 or older went backpacking at least once last year. Furthermore an estimated 51.6 million people camped at developed sites, while 31.5 million people chose to camp at primitive sites. Developed camping includes staying overnight near roads in developed campgrounds such as those provided on National Forests or National Parks, and especially those in State Parks. Primitive camping, on the other hand, includes staying overnight in more primitive settings lacking most of the amenities of a developed campground. For most primitive camping, one must carry water and provide all camping facilities, such as a table.

Table 2—Percent and number of people 16 years and older in the U.S. participating in land-resource-based outdoor activities, 1999-2000.

| Activity | Percent of Population 16 and Older | Number in Millions |
|---|---------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Trail/Street/Road Activities | | |
| Bicycling | 39.5 | 81.9 |
| Mountain Biking | 21.0 | 43.5 |
| Walking | 84.3 | 174.8 |
| Horse Riding & Equestrian | 10.2 | 21.1 |
| Hiking | 33.6 | 69.7 |
| Team Sport Activities | | |
| Softball, Soccer, Baseball etc | 22.1 | 45.8 |
| Backpacking & Camping Activities | | |
| Backpacking | 11.0 | 22.8 |
| Developed Camping | 24.9 | 51.6 |
| Primitive Camping | 15.2 | 31.5 |
| Visit a Wilderness or Primitive Area | 34.1 | 70.7 |
| Gather Mushrooms, Berries or Other Natural Products | 27.2 | 56.3 |
| Viewing & Learning Activities | | |
| Visiting a Nature Center, Nature Trail or Zoo | 57.5 | 119.2 |
| Visiting a prehistoric or Archaeological Site | 20.7 | 42.9 |
| Visit a Historic Site | 47.1 | 97.6 |

| Table 2 (continued) Activity | Percent of Population 16 and Older | Number in Millions |
|--|---------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Viewing & Photographing Activities | | |
| Bird-Watching | 33.5 | 69.4 |
| Viewing Other Wildlife | 45.9 | 95.2 |
| Viewing Wildflowers & Natural Vegetation | 45.4 | 94.1 |
| Viewing Natural Scenery | 60.9 | 126.2 |
| Hunting | | |
| Big Game | 8.3 | 17.2 |
| Small Game | 7.1 | 14.7 |
| Waterfowl | 2.4 | 4.9 |
| Driving for Pleasure & Sightseeing | | |
| Sightseeing | 53.7 | 111.3 |
| Driving for Pleasure Through Natural Scenery | 53.4 | 110.7 |
| Off-Road 4-Wheel Driving, ATV or Motorcycle | 17.3 | 35.9 |
| Traditional Social Activities | | |
| Family Gathering | 73.2 | 151.7 |
| Picnicking | 54.9 | 113.8 |

Source: 1999-2000 National Survey on Recreation and the Environment, USDA Forest Service and the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Tennessee. The NSRE 2000 is the most recent of the series of National Recreation Survey series begun nationally in 1960.

Viewing and learning activities, such as visiting nature centers, nature trails, zoo's and other outdoor-oriented education facilities are popular in the United States. An estimated 119.2 million people visited nature centers or trails last year, and a further 42.9 million people visited a prehistoric or archaeological site, such as Pueblo ruins or some of the Native American mounds in the eastern part of the country. Learning about nature, the natural environment, our culture and history is a significant reason for outdoor recreation in America, if participation estimates are any evidence.

Viewing and photographing activities, such as birdwatching, viewing wildlife (such as bears, deers, etc), viewing wildflowers and natural vegetation or scenery are also popular activities in the United States. An estimated 126.2 million people took the time last year to stop and observe the natural scenery around them. An estimated 94.1 million people also took the time to view wildlife or wildflowers, while 69.4 million people viewed birds.

Hunting: Three types of hunting are listed in Table 2, big game, small game and migratory birds. An estimated 17.2 million people hunt big game species, including deer, turkey, elk and other large birds or mammals. Some 14.7 million people hunt small game species, including squirrels, rabbits, and other small mammals. Almost five million hunt migratory birds, primarily ducks and geese.

Driving for pleasure and sightseeing activities are very popular outdoor recreation pastimes for many people in the United States. In fact, just over 130 million people spent time last year sightseeing or driving through natural scenery for pleasure.

Traditional Activities: Traditional activities include picnicking and family gatherings. More than half of the 207 million people 16 or older in the U.S. participate in picnicking. This experience can be as casual as a single person taking lunch in the nearby local park, or as elaborate as a gourmet spread of cheeses, wines, pickles, and breads among friends in the countryside. Often associated with picnicking are family gatherings outdoors. Throughout this country group shelters and multiple family sites have been developed to facilitate this very popular activity—151.7 million, 73.2 percent of the population. Family gatherings frequently involve annual or periodic reunions of relatives. Almost always they involve cooking outside, covered dishes brought from home, and sharing of memories.

Water-Based Activities

Boating and floating, fishing and swimming activities are the types of water-based activities summarized in Table 3.

Boating: The most popular boating activity is motor boating with 50.2 million participants, or 24.2 percent of the population 16 and older. Associated with motor boating is water skiing, in which almost 17 million people participate. Jet skiing is another form of engine-powered boating. Jet skiing is a relatively new activity brought about by jet water propulsion technology that has been marketed for less than 20 years. Its popularity has reached almost 20 million participants already.

Wind-powered boating (including sailboarding and windsurfing) is less popular than motorized forms of boating. Over ten million people sail and 1.7 million sailboard or windsurf. Sailing usually requires large bodies of water with stretches that are not limited by low bridges or shallow water. Along with sailboarding and windsurfing, sailing a boat requires a relatively high amount of skill.

Muscle-powered boating and floating activities include canoeing, kayaking, rowing and floating or rafting. Nearly twenty million people canoed last year, while 6.2 million kayaked. Kayaks are favored typically because of their maneuverability in steering a course through rapids, and a significant industry has developed to facilitate kayaking, rafting and other floating on whitewater or other fast-moving streams. Some outfitters have also begun renting tubes for floating less dangerous stretches of rivers. This form of recreation outfitting seems to be growing rapidly as an estimated 20.1 million people floated or rafted last year.

Fishing occurs in lakes, streams, and oceans. The type of water determines, in large part, the species sought and thus the type of fishing pursued. Of the nearly 71 million people in the U. S. who fish, 61.4 million fish in fresh water. Among those who fish in fresh water, most, about 48 million fish in warm water, a category of water bodies that includes most lakes, reservoirs, large rivers and ponds. Bass, crappie, and other species are the most familiar and sought after. About 27 million people aged 16 and older fish for cold water species, such as trout and northern pike. A special category of coldwater fishing is anadromous fishing for migratory species such as salmon. Almost nine million people fish for anadromous species. A further 20.3 million people fish in salt water including oceans (from shore and by boat), ocean inlets and sounds, tidal estuaries, and inland saltwater lakes.

Table 3—Percent and number of people 16 years and older in the U.S. participating in water-resource-based outdoor activities, 1999-2000.

| Activity | Percent of Population 16 and Older | Number in Millions |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Boating/Floating/Sailing | | |
| Sailing | 5.0 | 10.4 |
| Canoeing | 9.4 | 19.5 |
| Kayaking | 3.0 | 6.2 |
| Rowing | 4.5 | 9.3 |
| Motor-Boating | 24.2 | 50.2 |
| Water Skiing | 8.2 | 16.9 |
| Jet skiing | 9.2 | 19.5 |
| Floating, Rafting | 9.7 | 20.1 |
| Sailboarding/Windsurfing | 0.8 | 1.7 |
| Surfing | 1.5 | 3.1 |
| Fishing | | |
| Freshwater | 29.6 | 61.4 |
| Coldwater | 13.1 | 27.2 |
| Warmwater | 22.9 | 47.5 |
| Saltwater | 9.8 | 20.3 |
| Migratory Ocean-to-Freshwater | 4.3 | 8.9 |

| Table 3 (continued) Activity | Percent of Population 16 and Older | Number in Millions |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Swimming | | |
| Swimming/Lake, River, Ocean | 43.7 | 90.6 |
| Swimming in Freshwater | 28.9 | 59.9 |
| Swimming in Saltwater | 25.7 | 53.3 |
| Snorkeling | 6.6 | 13.7 |
| Scuba | 1.9 | 3.9 |
| Visit a Beach | 38.8 | 80.4 |
| Visit a Waterside | 27.1 | 56.2 |

Source: 1999-2000 National Survey on Recreation and the Environment, USDA Forest Service and the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Tennessee. The NSRE 2000 is the most recent of the series of National Recreation Survey series begun nationally in 1960.

Swimming: Of the nearly 124.4 million people who participate in some form of swimming activity, over 90 million spend some portion of their swimming in “natural” waters such as streams, lakes, ponds and oceans. Almost 14 million are estimated to go snorkeling, and just under 4 million scuba dive one or more times over the course of a year. An estimated 80 million people also visited a beach during the last year, while over 56 million visited a waterside area (other than a beach).

Snow-And-Ice-Based Activities

Downhill skiing, snowboarding, cross country skiing, and snowmobiling are the four types of snow and ice activities presented in Table 4.

Table 4—Percent and number of people 16 years and older in the U.S. participating in snow and ice-resource-based activities, 1999-2000.

| Activity | Percent of Population 16 and Older | Number in Millions |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Snow and Ice Activities | | |
| Downhill Skiing | 8.3 | 17.2 |
| Snowboarding | 4.6 | 9.5 |
| Cross Country Skiing | 3.8 | 7.9 |
| Snowmobiling | 5.2 | 10.8 |

Source: 1999-2000 National Survey on Recreation and the Environment, USDA Forest Service and the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Tennessee. The NSRE 2000 is the most recent of the series of National Recreation Survey series begun nationally in 1960.

Of the 53.3 million who participate in some form of snow and ice activity(ies), 17.2 million downhill ski, 7.9 million cross country ski, and 9.5 million snowboard downhill. Snowboarding has grown in popularity and become an established winter activity over the last five years. Similarly, snowmobiling is also becoming an established winter activity as an estimated 10.8 million people snowmobiled in the last year.

Comment

This report is only one of the NSRE 2000 reports to be produced. These early findings suggest that outdoor recreation is still a basic part of the American lifestyle. As a matter of lifestyle, traditional land, water, snow, and ice settings are still very much in demand as places for casual activities such as walking, picnicking, family gatherings, sightseeing, and visiting nature centers or nature trails.